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SUBJECT: PRAGMATISTS LEAD MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD'S LEADERSHIP
RACE, BUT FEEL PRESSURE AFTER HAMAS' VICTORY

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[I](#). AMMAN 520

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) Summary and introduction: Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood and its political auxiliary, the Islamic Action Front, have traditionally been pragmatic and established participants in Jordan's political order. Rank and file zealots -- mostly Palestinian-Jordanians and now energized by Hamas' electoral victory -- are pressing their old-guard, East Banker leaders to adopt more critical rhetoric toward GOJ policies. By mid-March, internal caucuses will produce new Shura Councils and executives for the movement. The two leading candidates for the most important job -- Controller General of the Brotherhood -- are East Bankers inclined to continue the movement's traditional strategy of accommodation with the GOJ. Two other candidates, both West Bankers, are long-shots, but may add to the pressure that Hamas sympathizers and other radicals are putting on the old guard to adopt a more confrontational posture toward the GOJ. The GOJ will continue to use the Brotherhood and the Front to manage and channel Islamists' political energies. End summary and introduction.

Part of the Establishment

[2](#). (C) The Muslim Brotherhood and its subordinate political party, the Islamic Action Front, are established elements of Jordan's political system. In the 1940s, members of the original, Egyptian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood spread the movement to Jordan. Throughout the sixties and seventies the Brotherhood worked with the GOJ against leftist, Palestinian, and pan-Arab parties that challenged Hashemite rule. Reinforcing this common interest in stability, family connections in this small country ensured that the Brotherhood's leadership and the government never drifted too far apart. For example, one of post's contacts on Islamist issues, East Banker Dr. Musa Kilani, has one brother who is a respected senior leader of the Brotherhood, and another (now deceased) who was head of the General Intelligence Directorate in the 1960s. Both the Palace and the government keep up close contacts with the Brotherhood's leadership. In 2003 then-PM Faisal Al-Fayez paid a public call on the movement's most senior leader, Controller General Abdul Majeed Al-Thuneibat; private communication is constant.

[3](#). (SBU) In 1990-91, the Front provided several ministers

to a Jordanian cabinet and held the speakership in the lower house of parliament. Although the Front boycotted the 1997 elections, it participated in the 2003 polls and won 17 of the 110 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The Front is by far Jordan's largest political party (other MPs are independents or the sole representatives of personal parties). The Brotherhood and the Front have benefited from the growth of political Islam that has been under way throughout the Muslim world for a generation, as well as from growing support among Palestinian-Jordanians, who make up at least 60 percent of Jordan's population.

¶4. (C) Islamist politicians are also boosted by a widespread perception that the movement's politicians are less corrupt than most secular politicians are assumed to be here. MP Raed Qaqish (Christian, Salt), a liberal who has clashed publicly with the Islamists, told poloff the Front MPs "are the only honest men" in the Chamber of Deputies. That said, being part of the political establishment, Islamist politicians have on occasion also been implicated in the political spoils and wasta systems here (ref C).

¶5. (C) Popular piety has revived considerably over the past generation; however it is not clear whether the Front's electoral potential has grown at the same rate. Many of the newly devout do not see a political dimension to their faith, while some of the more radical believe the Brotherhood and Front are too close to the GOJ. Some of these zealots gravitate toward informal Salafist prayer and discussion groups, and toward underground networks that function outside the tightly monitored mosque environments.

¶6. (C) In 1989, the Front won 30 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies; in 2003, their share dropped to

fifteen percent, though this was largely due to changes in the electoral law. Ibrahim Gharaibeh, a former Brotherhood official and now an editorialist for Al-Ghad, Jordan's second-largest daily, told poloff he thinks the Front would now take 30-40 percent of the vote under a reformed electoral law. Note: Gharaibeh, an East Banker, left the movement in 2002 after the Palestinian-Jordanian Hamzeh Mansour was elevated to a leadership position (see para 23). End note. Senator Muhammad Al-Azeideh, a former Front MP, told poloff he believes that even if the electoral system were reformed, the Front would not win more seats today than it took in 2003. Note: The Front expelled Al-Azeideh, an East Banker, in 1997 because he ignored its instructions to boycott the elections. He won a seat in the lower house as an independent. End note.

¶7. (C) USG and private-sector polls consistently show that thirty to forty percent of Jordanians support a strong role for the Muslim clergy and Islamist politicians in overseeing government, society and the media. Thus Gharaibeh's estimate seems reasonable to us.

Populist Rhetoric, Pragmatic Strategy

¶8. (C) The Brotherhood and the Front are vocal critics of U.S. and Israeli policies. They have declined to meet with U.S. officials since May, 2004, as a consequence of the Abu Ghraib controversy. They take populist, anti-reform stances on domestic economic issues, and often criticize Jordan's relationship with Israel. However, they usually do not criticize the monarchy and treat Jordan's close relationship with the U.S. as distasteful but necessary. Despite occasional disputes over the licensing of preachers, they generally acquiesce in the government's control of sermons in the country's mosques (ref B).

¶9. (SBU) The Brotherhood and Front are careful to remain within the law. Unlike the equally anti-American professional associations, the Front always seeks permits for its demonstrations against U.S. policies, and when permission is denied, accepts the decision. The Front

usually keeps its demonstrations orderly.

¶10. (C) Democratization is one of the top talking points for the Brotherhood and the Front. They are among the leading internal forces pushing for reform of Jordan's electoral law; the movement would benefit significantly if the law were amended to apportion parliamentary seats in a manner that better reflects the real distribution of Jordan's population. The National Agenda reform plan (ref I) -- which representatives of the Front helped shape -- endorses similar electoral changes.

East Bank, West Bank

¶11. (C) In recent years, the Brotherhood and the Front have become the chief advocates for the redress of Palestinian-Jordanians' grievances. These include the electoral law, which favors East Bank constituencies; an informal ban on Palestinian-Jordanians in the upper ranks of the security services and military; and complaints about the administration of citizenship regulations, which allegedly deny passports to some Palestinians of Gazan origin who are entitled to them (ref D). Post's secular Palestinian contacts are uncomfortable with this development, and worry it will encourage more East Bankers to view them as a liability to Jordan.

¶12. (C) East Bankers monopolized the leadership of the movement until 2002, when they made room for Palestinian-Jordanian Hamzeh Mansour as Secretary General of the Front (a position traditionally subordinate to the Brotherhood's executive, see para 13). The leadership is coming to terms with the fact that the majority of its membership, especially among the younger cohorts, is now of Palestinian origin.

Structure and Electoral Procedures

¶13. (U) The head of the Brotherhood, the Controller General (Al-Muraqib Al-'Aam) is the most senior leader of the movement. He and the Brotherhood's executive board effectively appoint the leadership of the Front, which takes daily policy direction from the leadership of the Brotherhood. The Front is in theory an independent organization, an arrangement required by Jordanian law, but in fact it is a constituent element of the Brotherhood.

¶14. (SBU) The Brotherhood and the Front have parallel hierarchies, and the Front's members are all Muslim Brothers. Each organization has a network of two dozen local branches, a national Shura council, and a national executive board.

¶15. (U) The two organizations' elaborate system of elections and caucuses serves to maximize the influence of the movement's East Bank establishment, while presenting the appearance of procedural democracy. The memberships of both organizations' local branches elect local councils every two years. Every four years the entire memberships of each organization elect national Shura Councils, and the two Shura Councils in turn elect executive boards. The Brotherhood's Shura Council consists of 51 members; the Front's of 120. In addition, local branches send representatives to a national convention of the movement every four years.

¶16. (U) The Brotherhood's current Controller General, Abdul Majeed al-Thuneibat, has been in charge of the movement since 1994, and is running for re-election (see para 18). The Secretary General (Al-Amin al-'Aam) of the Front is the moderate West Banker Hamzeh Mansour.

This Year's Caucuses

¶17. (U) The Brotherhood's twenty-four local branches began selecting their local councils February 8. We expect the Front to begin its own cycle of elections in the coming days.

¶18. (U) The race for the movement's most senior position, Controller General of the Brotherhood, is shaping up among four contenders. The incumbent, Abdul Majeed Al-Thuneibat, is running for a fourth term and is favored to win. A strong challenger, however, is Dr. Abdul Latif Al-Arabiyyat, currently head of the Front's Shura Council. Both are East Bankers with reputations as pragmatists. Two Palestinian-Jordanian candidates are also running: the moderate Hamzeh Mansour, outgoing Secretary General of the Front; and Dr. Hummam Sa'id, a radical member of the Brotherhood's Shura Council. Both West Bankers are long-shots, but their candidacies could serve as rallying points for admirers of Hamas and for other radicals.

¶19. (U) As for the Front's leadership, a position that traditionally takes its cues from the Brotherhood, Al-Thuneibat, in the name of the Brotherhood's executive board, in early February effectively named Zaki Sa'ed bani Irsheid to succeed Hamzeh Mansour as Secretary General. Irsheid is a member of the Front's Shura Council and we expect his fellow councilors to accept the Brotherhood's recommendation, as they traditionally do. However, radical West Banker Jamil Abu Baker has also thrown his kafieh into the ring. It would be unprecedented for the Front's Shura council to ignore the Brotherhood's nomination of Irsheid, and post believes Abu Baker's run is something of a publicity stunt. (See paras 25-35 for bio data on each candidate).

Hamas Victory Sets Off Internal Debates

¶20. (U) Some members of the movement have taken the Hamas victory as an occasion to question the Brotherhood's traditional strategy of accommodation with the GOJ, and to call for the movement to seek power. Islamic Action Front member of parliament Azzam Al-Huneidi (West Banker, Amman) told London-based Al-Hayat January 30 that Islamists were "ready" to score an electoral victory in Jordan similar to that of Hamas and to "take charge of the government" (ref H). Muhammad Al-Thuneibat, a former Minister of Administrative Development, and a cousin of Brotherhood Controller General Abdul Majeed Al-Thuneibat, told poloffs that after the Hamas victory, the "youngsters" in Jordan's movement were asking their leaders why the Front shouldn't be represented in Jordan's government again.

¶21. (C) The debate over the Jordanian Brotherhood's posture toward Hamas reflects the East Bank-West Bank fault line that underlies most political questions in Jordan. Debate during this month's caucuses is focused on whether or not the movement should call more forcefully for the GOJ to accommodate Hamas with high-level meetings, the re-opening of Hamas offices in Jordan, and even the return of Khalid Mashal and three other Hamas leaders expelled in ¶1999. At the time of the expulsions, the East Bankers dominating the movement's leadership remained largely quiet, despite the complaints of Palestinian-Jordanian members.

¶22. (C) Muhammad Al-Thunaibat told poloffs that a consensus is forming within the Jordanian movement to support Hamas more closely. Many East Bank Brothers remain hostile to proposals to link their movement with the foreign interests of Hamas, he said, but "even among the East Bankers, some feel guilty for not having spoken out in support of Mashal in 1999."

¶23. (C) According to Gharaibeh and Kilani, there is an understanding between Hamas and the Jordanian Brotherhood/Front that each will not recruit on the other's territory, but East Bank Brothers accuse Hamas of ignoring this agreement. Gharaibeh told poloffs that he left the

movement with a number of fellow East Bankers because Palestinian-Jordanians "took over" the Front with the election in 2002 of Hamzeh Mansour as Secretary General. According to Gharaibeh, fifteen of the 51 current members of the Brotherhood's Shura council are serving Hamas cadres and continue to draw salaries from Hamas. Gharaibeh says Jordan's security services share the blame for this "takeover," claiming the GOJ believed it could more easily manage the Islamic movement if Mansour's Palestinian-Jordanian faction gained control of first the Front, and later of the Brotherhood itself. (Comment: Conversely, Palestinian-Jordanian contacts accuse the security services of manipulating the movement's internal politics in favor of East Bankers. End Comment)

124. (C) Post's contacts also emphasized that despite the impetus Hamas' victory has given to the radicals, the GOJ's security services wield an important veto in the movement's deliberations. Jordan's security services exercise considerable influence over many of Jordan's politicians, using a toolkit that includes patronage, financial inducements and bureaucratic and legal harassment; this influence extends to the Brotherhood and Front as well. While working to ensure the Brotherhood and Front do not cross red lines, the security services also seek to avoid the appearance of muzzling the movement, lest too many Islamists opt for illegal networks where they cannot be monitored. They will use their influence over the movement's current leadership races in an attempt to head off a radical outcome.

Leading Personalities in the Brotherhood and Front

125. (U) Some leaders in the movement to watch:

126. (SBU) Abdul Majeed Al-Thuneibat. East Banker. Controller General of the Brotherhood since 1994 and thus the most senior leader among Jordan's legal Islamists. He announced in January, 2006 his candidacy for another four-year term. Most observers favor him to win re-election. His leadership over the past twelve years has been marked by pragmatism, the accommodation of more Palestinians in the movement's leadership (while still reserving ultimate control to his fellow East Bankers), and popular stances against corruption, the U.S., Israel, and the elimination of subsidies. He is about 60 years old, and is from Kerak. He worked as a teacher, earned a bachelor's degree in law in Syria, worked as an attorney, then began working his way up through a series of posts in the Brotherhood. He has never run for parliament or served in government.

127. (SBU) Abdul Latif 'Arabiyat. East banker. Currently head of the Front's Shura Council, he has announced his candidacy for the leadership of the Brotherhood. Within the Brotherhood he is viewed as a moderate. He was born in Salt in 1933. He earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural engineering from the University of Baghdad in 1960, an M.Sc. in agricultural education from the University of Texas in 1968, and a Ph.D. in vocational education in 1975 from the same school. He started as a schoolteacher and by 1982 was secretary general of the Ministry of Education. He was elected to the Chamber of Deputies for Salt in 1989 as a candidate of the Front. He was speaker of the Chamber from 1990 - 1993. The GOJ appointed him to the Senate in 1993.

128. (SBU) Hamzeh Mansour, West Banker. Outgoing Secretary General of the Islamic Action Front, he has also

SIPDIS

announced his candidacy for the Brotherhood's Controller Generalship. Mansour was the first West Banker to head the Front. This was an important breakthrough for Palestinian-Jordanians even though, as noted above, the Secretary General is a de facto subordinate of the Brotherhood's executive board. Mansour was born near Haifa in 1944. He worked as a teacher in Ma'an and Sahab until 1978. He

earned a master's degree in education from the University of Jordan in 1984. He served as a head of department within the Ministry of Education from 1978-1989. He won a

seat in the parliaments of 1989 and 1993 as a candidate of the Front.

¶29. (C) Mansour (continued): Some observers say East Bankers in the movement resent Mansour because he is Palestinian-Jordanian, while at the same time some radicals (including fellow West Bankers) fault him for being insufficiently critical of GOJ policies. His candidacy for the Controller-Generalship is a long-shot.

¶30. (SBU) Hummam Sa'id, West Banker. Another long-shot candidate for the Secretary Generalship, he is a radical member of the Front's Shura Council and a former MP. He was born in Kufr Ra'i (near Jenin) in 1944. He earned a doctorate in Fiqh from Al-Azhar in 1977, and later did post-doctoral studies in comparative religion at Temple University in Pennsylvania. In Jordan he was a schoolteacher and later a professor of Sharia until his election to parliament in 1989.

¶31. (SBU) Zaki Sa'ed Bani Irsheid. East Banker. The Brotherhood's executive board nominated him in February, 2006, to become Secretary General of the Front. He is currently a member of the Front's Shura Council. About 50 years old, he is from the Al-Kura area east of Amman. He earned a two-year degree in engineering from a Jordanian technical school, and worked for a number of years in the Jordan Phosphate Company. He was not well-known outside the movement before he was nominated this month.

¶32. (C) Irsheid (continued): Post's contacts say East Bankers in the movement complain that Irsheid, though an East Banker himself, is close to Shura Councilors who identify with Hamas (see para 23). The Brotherhood's leadership may hope that Irsheid, as an East Banker on good terms with West Banker radicals, can mollify Jordanian-Palestinians who had hoped another West Banker would succeed Hamzeh Mansour.

¶33. (SBU) Jamil Abu Baker. West Banker. Despite the tradition that the Brotherhood's leadership nominates the Front's Secretary General, Abu Baker has independently announced his candidacy for the Front's leadership. He is currently First Deputy to the Front's Secretary General. His profile in the movement was boosted in January, 2006 when the GOJ charged him with defaming the state and then dropped the charges after an outcry from both Islamists and liberals. The charges stemmed from the posting in December 2004 of a complaint on the IAF website that a number of government officials had received their appointments as a result of family relationships rather than professional qualifications -- a dog-bites-man story by the standards of Jordan's media.

¶34. (SBU) Muhammad Abu Fares, West Banker. A member of parliament since 1989, Abu Fares is widely considered the most radical of the Front's MPs. He was born in 1940 in the Gaza Strip. He earned a BA in Shari'ah in Damascus, and an MA and Ph.D. at Al-Azhar, and is currently the chairman of the Shari'ah department at the University of Jordan.

¶35. (C) Abu Fares (continued): He is not a candidate this month for the movement's leadership positions, but he will be an influential voice in those contests. He is a standard-bearer for Palestinian-Jordanians in the movement who would like to see the old guard replaced, and wants the movement to more vocally challenge GOJ policies.

Conclusion

¶36. (C) There is a long-term struggle for control underway within the movement, between the East Banker

establishment and Palestinian-Jordanian challengers. That struggle will color the near-term debate over how hard to push the GOJ on its Hamas policy and other issues. The still-considerable grip of the pragmatic old guard leadership, along with the influence of the Jordanian security services, should ensure that the East Bank establishment emerges from this month's caucuses with its control of the movement confirmed. However, in order to accommodate their base, which is increasingly Palestinian-Jordanian and more radical than they, we expect the leadership to become more vocal in its criticism of the GOJ. The Brotherhood and Front are important forces in Jordan's system, and Jordan's leaders cannot afford to ignore them.

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